

**Remarks for
Secy. LaHood
Distracted Driving NOYS PSA Announcement
National Press Club
April 29, 2010**

Good morning.

Almost exactly 7 months ago, more than 30,000 people from all 50 states and 12 different countries tuned into the Obama Administration's first national summit to address a deadly, growing epidemic in our country – distracted driving.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has taken the lead and engaged in an all-out assault on this problem, which killed nearly 6,000 people and injured more than half a million in 2008 – with new losses reported almost daily.

These victims aren't just statistics.

They're parents who lost children. And children who lost parents.

Every one of these tragic losses was unnecessary, because crashes caused by distracted drivers are 100 percent preventable.

It's all about the choices we make when we get behind the wheel.

Do we give our undivided attention to the road ahead?

Or do we allow our eyes, our hands, and our minds to wander in order to answer a ringing cell phone, or read or send a text message?

The right choice seems clear.

Most Americans – including opinion-makers like Oprah Winfrey – now agree that texting while driving is especially dangerous.

Oprah and I will both make that point crystal clear tomorrow, during her program.

Regrettably, however, many drivers continue to engage in this risky, irresponsible behavior day after day.

Here's what we're up against:

During one recent week in April, police officers in Hartford, Connecticut cited WELL OVER TWO THOUSAND drivers for talking on cell phones – plus over TWO HUNDRED MORE for texting while driving.

That's just one week! In one city!

These officers are participating in our first Federally funded pilot program to test the effect of stepped-up law enforcement efforts, combined with public advertising, on distracted driving.

This is a brand new program – and it's clear that many drivers haven't gotten the message yet: If you've got a phone in one hand, you'll get a ticket in the other.

I hope this program will help to stop the madness.

Just 3 weeks ago, a college student driving her car in upstate New York died when her vehicle rolled over.

What was she doing?

Sending a late-night text message.

And earlier this week, a 24-year-old man in Western Massachusetts was so involved in his texting that he lost control of his car and crashed into a house!

Now, if it's THIS difficult for adults to set aside distractions in the car, imagine how hard it is for the youngest, least experienced drivers – teenagers.

Over HALF of teens aged 16 and 17 who own cell phones report they've talked on the phone while driving.

Over a THIRD admit to texting behind the wheel.

And NEARLY HALF of all teens aged 12 to 17 say they've been in a car when the driver was texting.

Those are the chilling results of a new survey from the Pew Research Center.

And our families are paying a truly terrible price.

This has got to stop.

Fortunately, we know what it's going to take to turn this situation around.

After all, fewer drunk drivers are on the road today – and more people than ever are wearing seatbelts – thanks to an aggressive combination of publicity and education, effective law enforcement, and tough penalties.

By taking actions like these, we CAN change people's behavior.

And teenagers like Bethany Brown – a 16-year-old Honors student from suburban Phoenix who's here with us today – will help us do it.

Bethany understands that “real life offers no re-do's.”

That's the theme of the winning public service video she created for a contest inspired by our Distracted Driving Summit last fall.

The contest was sponsored by two groups that have done so much to help educate young drivers -- the National Organizations for Youth Safety and the National Road Safety Foundation.

We're grateful to Sandy Spavone and Michelle Anderson for leading the charge against distracted driving at these organizations, and for inspiring so many young people to submit entries for this public-service campaign.

Bethany's 30-second spot – which you'll see in a moment – will air on national television after its debut in May during National Youth Traffic Safety Month.

Bethany is herself a newly licensed driver, and she said the research she did for her video was an eye-opening experience.

She was surprised to learn, for instance, that so many teen drivers have died because they were texting.

And now she tells anyone who will listen – including her friends and even her Dad – that talking, texting, and driving don't mix.

If we're serious about changing people's behavior behind the wheel, then we need motivated young people like Bethany to get involved and spread the word on film, at school, and in the community.

Congratulations, Bethany, and thank you for creating such an effective message.

I hope many, many young drivers will see the video and think about it.

We at DOT are proud to lead the effort to end distracted driving.

And we're proud of all we've accomplished so far – from our ban on texting by commercial truck and bus drivers and Federal workers, to our sample legislation for state lawmakers who want to pass strong distracted-driving laws.

We're also very pleased by the number of public and private organizations that have stepped up to join us – consumer advocates, insurance and wireless executives, local law enforcement agencies, and the research community.

Congress is taking this seriously, too.

And of course, we've got Oprah on our side.

But even with an army of allies, this is ultimately a deeply personal matter – it's about taking responsibility for your actions.

So please, when you're behind the wheel, take our message to heart: Put it down—your Blackberry, your cell phone, your GPS device, whatever takes your focus off the road.

Because there are no “re-do's in real life.” You may not get a second chance.

And now, let's watch Bethany Brown's winning video, which helps to remind all of us what's at stake.

Thank you.